

# **Maxpak Site Community Planning Process Concerns and Recommendations Report**

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## Executive Summary

This document represents the final report of the Maxpak Community Planning Process. It summarizes the results of meetings and workshops over nine months examining potential opportunities and issues surrounding the redevelopment of a 5.49-acre industrial site, commonly referred to as the Maxpak Site. The development of this document occurred in two distinct phases. The first consisted of six workshops during the fall of 2004, which resulted in the development of a number of **Community Concerns** contained herein. The second involved nine meetings of a smaller committee chosen by the Mayor from the larger group of workshop participants, referred to as the Design and Development Review Committee (DDRC). The DDRC worked to develop a series of **Committee Recommendations** based on the concerns generated during the fall workshops.

The goal of the **Community Concerns** and **Committee Recommendations** is to inform potential developers and public officials. The document is structured to serve as a summary of the planning process and as a guide for any further discussion on the redevelopment of the Maxpak site. This document should not preclude, but rather encourage, further community involvement in the review and discussion of the redevelopment of this site. Most importantly, the results contained in this "Concerns and Recommendations Report" are not intended to serve as a legal document or an implicit approval by the community of any specific development proposal.

The "Concerns and Recommendations Report" is divided into four sections. The introduction outlines the goals of the report, describes the planning process, and includes a description of the site. The second section defines the overall Community Concerns. The third section contains the Design and Development Review Committee's Recommendations. Finally, the Appendix provides additional information about the site and contains summaries and materials from the fall 2004 workshops.

A summary of the major concepts contained in the final **Committee Recommendations** are listed below:

- The previous industrial use on the site or the reuse of existing buildings should not be used as a guide for the redevelopment of the site.
- Residential uses are the most appropriate for this site. A mix of housing types is strongly desired to reflect neighborhood context.
- Site plan must seek to minimize the impact of motor vehicles and enhance the pedestrian environment. The Committee anticipates that the developer

**will propose access off the Lowell Street Bridge, while not endorsing it explicitly.**

- **Any development must be especially sensitive to the traditional neighborhood context surrounding the site. Development should embrace the neighborhood scale and not be designed to turn its back on any of the surrounding communities.**
- **Traffic delay, congestion and vehicular and pedestrian safety are serious impediments to the quality of life in this area. A developer must demonstrate that no project will create impacts that cannot be mitigated.**
- **The extension of the Community Path is the paramount open space concern in this area. Any development must not hinder its completion and not detract from its utility or appearance.**
- **It is extremely important that any development seek to minimize any negative impact and strive to improve the appearance and quality of life of residents both on the site and in the surrounding neighborhoods.**
- **This document should be used as a guide and should not be viewed as a substitute for any other required review or design discussions.**
- **The key to a successful development of the Maxpak Site is through the City's active involvement in assuring mitigation requirements for past and present projects are upheld and with diligent enforcement of the City's laws.**

## Introduction

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### Goals

The primary goal of this document is to inform public officials and potential developers of the community's issues and suggestions for the redevelopment of the Maxpak site.

Specific goals are:

- To guide discussion of the development of the site with both developers and local government officials and agencies
- To identify **Community Concerns** and **Committee Recommendations** that might address those concerns

This document should serve to frame the discussion as proposals are put forth for the redevelopment of the site, not as an end to discussion. The committee recommendations are not a substitute for any permitting or regulatory process such as zoning or environmental permits. It is the intention of this document to set performance standards by which any development should be measured, not to contemplate a maximum size of development.

### Process Description

During the winter of 2004 the owners of 56-61 Clyde Street, KSS Realty Partners, introduced initial plans for development of the Maxpak site, containing up to 305 units. In the summer of 2004 Mayor Joseph Curtatone and Alderman Sean O'Donovan requested that all redevelopment plans for the site be put on hold so that the City could undertake a community planning process focused on future redevelopment of the parcels. Mayor Curtatone and Alderman O'Donovan felt that both the City and residents of the surrounding neighborhoods needed time to understand the issues and opportunities the site presented. The intent of the process was to define community concerns over the redevelopment of the site, identify issues that needed to be addressed, and to develop a document to guide redevelopment of the site.

Starting in September 2004 Alderman Sean O'Donovan, in association with the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (SPCD), held a series of meetings focusing on the site's redevelopment. The initial meeting involved a "visioning session," attended by 70 residents, that resulted in a general list of the community's thoughts on the strengths and

weaknesses of the area. Based on the ideas generated at this meeting, SPCD designed a series of five workshops focused on the following issues: traffic and transportation, site design, real estate finance, zoning and land use, environmental contamination, and open space.

In order to bring in outside experts to assist the City, SPCD asked the site owners for funds with which to bring in consultants. KSS Realty made an initial contribution of \$30,000 (an additional \$5,000 was later added due to additional work requested by community members) to facilitate this request. Upon receiving the funds, the City engaged in a standard MGL 30B procurement procedure to obtain these professional services. The consultants were hired by the City of Somerville and were retained exclusively to assist the City with the workshop process. Furthermore, they were instructed that they would be unable to engage in subsequent work for any developer on this site without the approval of the community.

Throughout the fall of 2004 consultant presentations were made on issues identified in the visioning session. In addition to the formal presentations, several Q&A and break out sessions were held. Various consultants, as well City Staff, participated in each workshop, either as presenters or facilitators of the small group breakout sessions. Copies of the presentations as well as summaries of the workshops are included in the Appendix portion of this document.

It was determined, after the final workshop in January 2005, that further work and community input would be required to complete a final document. In order to continue moving the planning process forward, Mayor Curtatone named 11 community members to the Maxpak Site Design and Development Review Committee to further develop this document. The committee represented a broad cross section of the neighborhoods surrounding the site and was chosen to represent a variety of opinions and interest groups. City Staff produced an initial draft recommendations document based on the community input from the visioning session and workshops. This document was given to the Committee in March of 2005. The Committee met nine times between March and May of 2005 working to expand and revise this **Concerns and Recommendations Report**.

## **Description of Site and Context**

The "Maxpak" site consists of 56 and 61 Clyde Street, two former industrial sites located between the active Lowell Branch of the MBTA Commuter Rail and an inactive rail spur (Davis Square Freight Cut-Off). The inactive spur will be converted into an extension of the Community Path that currently terminates at Cedar Street. Access to the site is currently constrained to

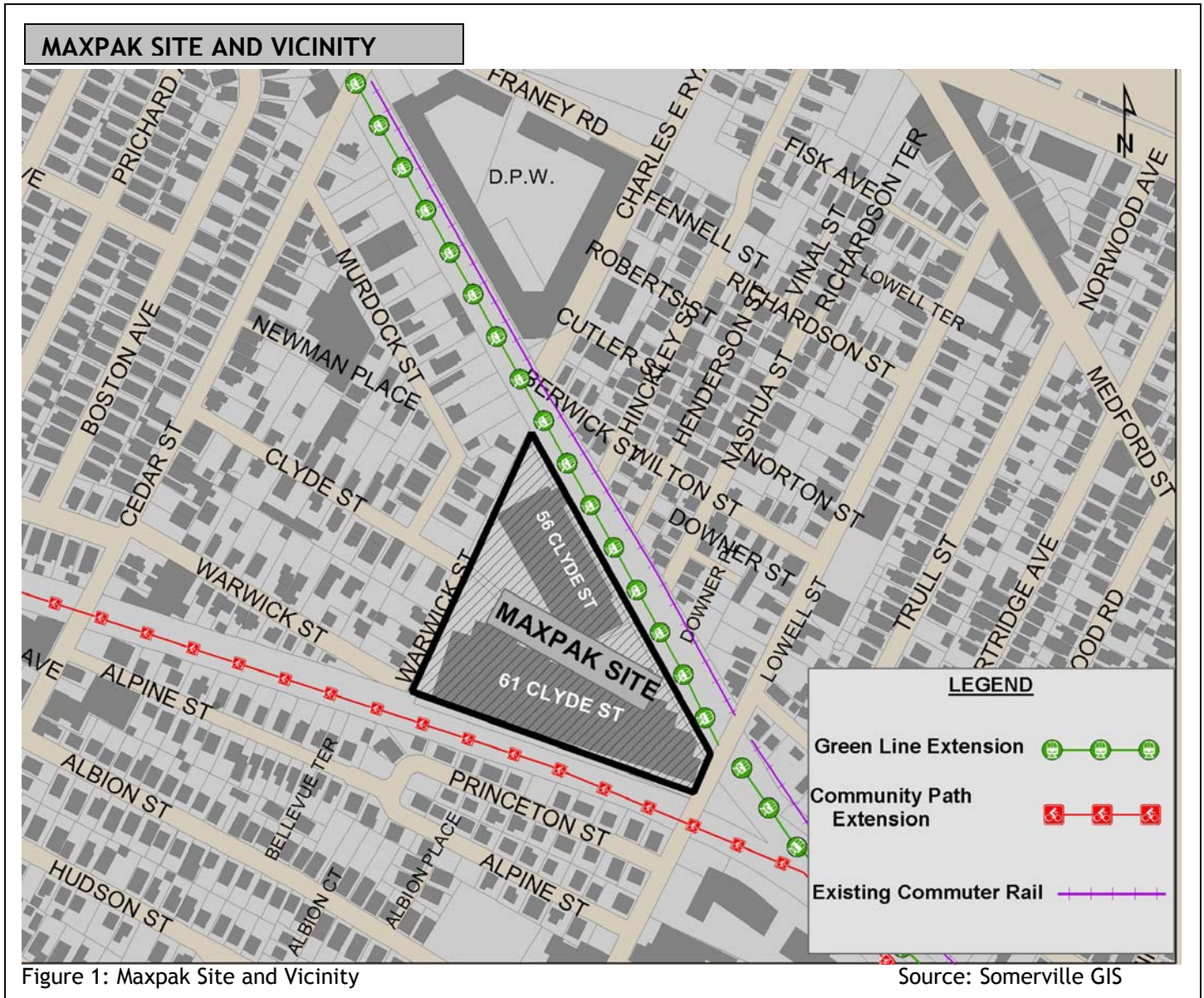
ingress from Warwick Street and egress on Clyde Street. Cedar Street is the collector for both streets.

The site is a total of 239,410 square feet (5.49 acres). It has dimensions of 545 linear feet in the west, 630 feet along the proposed community path, 81 in the east along Lowell Street, and 893 feet to the north abutting the Lowell Branch commuter rail tracks.

Three buildings are currently located on the site. All three are no longer in use and have fallen into various states of disrepair. Over the past eighty years the site has been home to a number of industrial uses including a Hires Root Beer factory, package factory, construction supply, and International Paper factory. The name "Maxpak Site" is taken from one of the industrial companies that had used the site in the 1980's and early 1990's. The last industrial user, L Hide Construction Supplies, closed its doors in 2002. In 1999 a SABIS charter school with 108 students opened a new structure at 61 Clyde Street. The school remained in operation until 2002. Since the closing of the school the site has been primarily vacant other than occasional temporary use. Both sites are currently owned by KSS Realty Partners.

The area surrounding the Maxpak site consists of a mixture of one, two, and multi-unit buildings with a predominance of traditional two and three family wood frame structures. Both to the east and west the residential fabric is interspersed with small industrial and commercial buildings either composed of brick or cinder block. The areas to the north and south are predominantly residential alone. To the east, the VNA Assisted Living Center is a four-story structure comprising 100 units of assisted living housing.





## Existing Zoning

The Somerville Zoning Ordinance, as set forth under §6.1.2., states, "The purpose of Residential B (RB) zoning is: To establish and preserve medium density neighborhoods of one-, two- and three-family homes, free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents of such districts." This purpose is further reflected in the Table of Permitted Uses, §7.11 of the SZO, which only allows for up to three residential units per lot by right in a RB zone. §7.3 of the SZO does allow for an exception to this rule, if developers choose to pursue a special permit. The second paragraph of §7.3 reads, "In Residence A and Residence B districts, where developments include a minimum of ten percent (10%) affordable housing units on-site, but in no case less than one (1) affordable unit, as defined by Section 2.2.4, the above standards may be waived by the SPGA through application for special permit with site plan review. In all cases, the minimum lot area per dwelling unit and other dimensional and parking requirements of Article 8 and Article 9 shall be met."

Additionally, it should be noted that it is possible to apply for Site Plan Approval under §8.8 and §5.4 of the SZO to subdivide a lot. Subdividing a large lot into smaller lots requires the applicant to satisfactorily demonstrate, among other things, that each of the newly created lots is accessible, meets the minimum lot size requirements for an RB zone (7,500 s.f.), and complies with the minimum lot frontage requirements for an RB zone (50 ft).

## **Community Concerns**

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The fall workshop process identified several core community concerns about the redevelopment of the site. SPCD Staff and consultants recorded these concerns as they were raised in the Q&A sessions, break out groups, or were submitted to SPCD through conventional or electronic mail. Related concerns have been grouped into larger topic areas and organized in such a way as to relate to the recommendations proposed by the Design and Development Review Committee. The organization is intended to facilitate clarity of the relationship between the Community Concerns and resulting Committee Recommendations.

### **Existing Conditions**

Residents are concerned about the process for cleaning up the site, the nature of contamination on the site, and the effect that remediation will have on them and their families.

Frequently mentioned issues:

- Potential for the contamination to spread either through the air or groundwater
- Impact of contamination on public health surrounding the site
- Responsibility if developer doesn't clean site
- Cost of clean up
- How to determine what is "clean"

### **Neighborhood Context**

Residents value the residential nature of their neighborhoods. There was a substantial concern about whether the development would undermine the traditional neighborhood development surrounding the site.

Frequently mentioned issues:

- Overall size of development in relation to surrounding neighborhoods
- Preservation of the two and three family nature of the existing neighborhood
- Effect on property values
- Whether units are owner occupied, rental and/or absentee landlords

- Number of new families different unit types would attract
- Effect on neighborhood parking
- Strong desire for a diverse population and for new residents to be "rooted in the community"
- Erosion of protections offered by existing zoning and building codes
- Length of project construction and construction vehicular access to site

## Building Design

The negative impacts related to the overbuilding of the site and its surrounding neighborhoods were frequently expressed as a concern regarding future development.

Frequently mentioned issues:

- Building height
- Impact of overbuilding on the existing quality of life
- Quality of building design
- Increased noise in surrounding neighborhoods due to size of new buildings
- Pest control during and after construction

## Traffic and Parking

Motor vehicular traffic and its impact on safety and quality of life was by far the issue of most concern according to the community.

Frequently mentioned issues:

- Sight lines at Clyde and Cedar Streets
- Queuing at Cedar and Highland
- Uncertainty about the reopening of the Lowell Street Bridge and accurately predicting how much traffic it will attract
- Traffic on Warwick, Clyde and Murdock Streets
- Effect of cut-through traffic on surrounding streets
- Level of Service <sup>1</sup>(congestion) in Magoun Square
- Air pollution caused by motor vehicle traffic

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<sup>1</sup> Level of Service is a measurement describing the operational conditions, from "A" (best) to "F" (worst), of street segments or intersections by determination of a volume to capacity ratio (V/C), the amount of capacity of a street which is being utilized by traffic. Level of Service is used to determine vehicle delay.

- Loss of existing on-street spaces for existing residents from overflow of new development

## **Open Space/Community Path**

Participants were concerned with how development on the site would interact with the proposed extension of the Community Path past the site. Some also expressed a desire for a broad array of different types of open space that would enhance their quality of life.

Frequently mentioned issues:

- Amount of public and private open space
- Access to the Community Path
- Impact of development on the experience of path users
- Effect of contamination on any new open space
- Safety and maintenance issues for public and private open space

## **Additional Concerns**

### **Green Line Extension**

The community expressed concern over the potential of a Green Line stop near the site both in terms of whether redevelopment of the site would increase the possibility of a Green Line station and what impact the station would have on the existing neighborhood.

Frequently mentioned issues:

- Potential impact of Green Line on quality of life
- Will development increase the potential of the Green Line project occurring?
- Increased density the presence of the Green Line could generate
- Noise potential of additional trains in the area
- Access from surrounding neighborhoods to a potential station

## Committee Recommendations

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### Existing Conditions

The previous industrial use on the site or the reuse of existing buildings should not be used as a guide for the redevelopment of the site.

- The existing buildings should be demolished. The current structures on the site, previously used for industrial manufacturing, are inconsistent with the residential character of the surrounding neighborhoods, consisting of single and small multi-family homes.
- The previous industrial uses have left the site with soil contamination that must be remediated<sup>2</sup> according to state environmental standards, and protect new inhabitants and surrounding neighborhoods. The committee does not recommend capping the site as an acceptable alternative for thorough remediation.

### Neighborhood Context

#### Uses

Residential uses are the most appropriate for this site. A mix of housing types is strongly desired to reflect neighborhood context.

- New uses on the site should be predominantly residential. In addition, opportunities for small-scale retail if appropriate could be examined.
- Owner occupancy should be encouraged wherever it is feasible.
- Any development should consider the needs of families.

#### Site Planning

Site plan must seek to minimize the impact of motor vehicles and enhance the pedestrian environment. The Committee anticipates that the developer will propose access off the Lowell Street Bridge, while not endorsing it explicitly.

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<sup>2</sup> Remediation is the cleanup or other methods used to remove or contain contamination or hazardous materials on a site.

- The project should be well integrated and compatible with the existing neighborhood context, mindful of scale, use of materials, and proportions.
- Committee recommends that if a Lowell Street Bridge opening is needed there **MUST** be two distinct and unconnected vehicular access points (at the Lowell St. and Warwick Street sides) in order to prevent cut-through automobile traffic and balance the traffic created by the project.
- Streetscape within the site should be designed to a high standard, with particular attention paid to the pedestrian environment and to the access points to the existing neighborhoods.
- Site planning should make provisions for public pedestrian access to the Green Line.
- There should be three pedestrian/bicycle access connections (ramps compliant with ADA requirements) to the Community Path:
  - 1) Warwick Street to the Community Path (public access)
  - 2) The middle of the site to the Community Path (private and/or public access)
  - 3) Lowell Street to the Community Path (public access)
- The Community Path should be viewed as a viable transportation option as well as recreational path.

## **Building Design**

Any development must be especially sensitive to the traditional neighborhood context surrounding the site. Development should embrace the neighborhood scale and not be designed to turn its back on any of the surrounding communities.

- All buildings should be designed to a high standard.
- The overall design of the development must take into account the context, scale and residential character of the surrounding neighborhoods. The façades, massing and siting of the buildings should reflect this context and scale.
- Buildings facing Warwick Street should be of similar height and scale as the buildings existing on that street. Building height should not exceed 40'-0'.

- Taller and larger buildings, if used, should increase scale and height in well-designed increments toward Lowell Street. However, any increase in height must fully contemplate the effect on all surrounding neighborhoods.
- No building should be taller than four stories and should take advantage of grade changes to reduce apparent height.
- If larger structures are used, façade articulation<sup>3</sup> should create a friendly residential scale and rhythm.
- Site design and building configuration should reduce the sound impact of the existing railroad corridor on abutting properties. It is recommended that developers submit an acoustical study illustrating the impact of new structures.
- Development should have appropriate fenestration<sup>4</sup>, façade articulation (such as balconies, porches, and decks), and unit configuration on all sides facing existing neighborhoods so that no neighborhood overlooks a defined rear of the development, such as a blank wall.
- Any development should be professionally managed and a clear definition made as to maintenance responsibilities of open spaces within the development.
- Development should strive to incorporate sustainable and energy efficient site and building design measures. Achieving a high level of LEED<sup>5</sup> and Energy Star certification is strongly encouraged.

## Traffic and Parking

Traffic delay, congestion and vehicular and pedestrian safety are serious impediments to the quality of life in this area. A developer must demonstrate that no project will create impacts that cannot be mitigated.

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<sup>3</sup> Facade articulation is an architectural term that refers to the use of visual elements to break up a long expanse of wall or other continuous portion of the exterior of a building.

<sup>4</sup> Fenestration refers to the arrangement of windows in a building.

<sup>5</sup> L.E.E.D (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is a program operated by the US Green Building Council. More information on LEED can be found on the web at [http://usgbc.org/LEED/LEED\\_main.asp](http://usgbc.org/LEED/LEED_main.asp).



- There should be no through-site motor vehicular connection that could be used as a 'cut-through' between Cedar and Lowell Streets. Streets should not connect. It is the intention to limit motor vehicular traffic through the site, not to limit pedestrian or bicycle access or undermine the visual connections of the site to the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Specific analysis of the effect of the development on the following streets should be completed: Clyde, Warwick, Murdock, Cedar, Lowell, Highland, Alpine, Albion, Lexington, Morrison, Medford at Lowell, Magoun Square, Wilton, Richardson, Hudson, Vernon, and Princeton.
- Traffic forecasts should take into account potential growth in existing neighborhoods as well as the potential future development of the DPW Yards.
- Parking ratios should correspond to car utilization ratios in the City of Somerville (US Census) to limit the traffic impact on the surrounding community and encourage alternative transportation methods.
- Developer should put forth a plan to contain both resident and visitor parking on site to prevent overflow parking on city streets.
- Developer should coordinate with the MBTA and City as to possible station and access locations and report back to the community.
- Mitigation measures should include both traffic calming (to slow traffic and improve pedestrian safety) and traffic flow improvement measures (to reduce congestion) on area roadways.
- Development of the project should include efficiency innovations to reduce air pollution and traffic impacts, such as: smart cars, Zip cars, a shuttle bus to Davis Square, bike lockers and other bike user amenities for residents.
- Multiple parking areas or structures should not be visible from the adjacent neighborhoods, from the bike path or from any new proposed streets. When possible, parking design should be below grade or under the building footprint.

### Key Areas of Transportation Concern Around the Maxpak Site

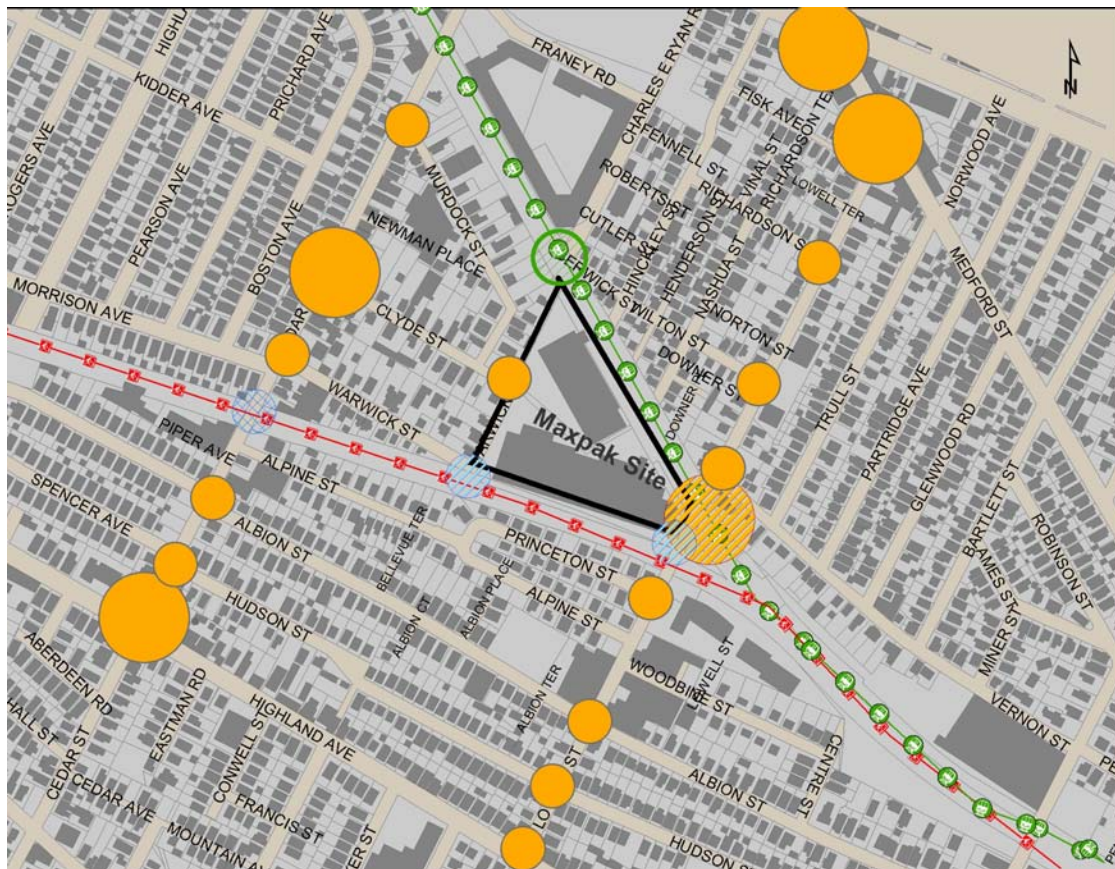
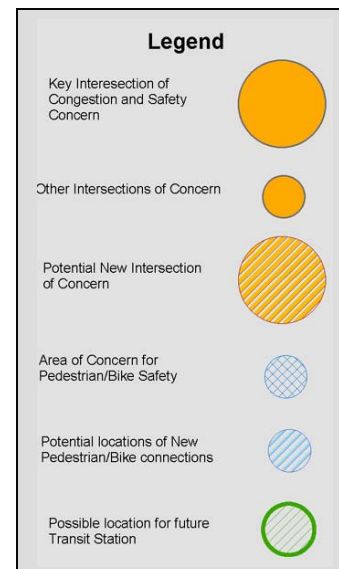


Figure 2: Key Areas of Transportation Concern around the Maxpak Site Source: Somerville GIS



## **Open Space/Community Path**

The extension of the Community Path is the paramount open space concern in this area. Any development must not hinder its completion and not detract from its utility or appearance.

- Development should maximize usable open space both for the benefit of residents of the development and neighbors.
- The development face along the Community Path should be landscaped in an attractive way to provide privacy to residents but not diminish the experience of others using the path.

## **Additional Recommendations**

### **Project Mitigation, Amenities, and Phasing**

It is extremely important that any development seek to minimize any negative impact, such as traffic and noise, on existing neighborhoods and improve the physical appearance of the existing site.

- Traffic impacts are of great concern to the surrounding neighborhoods. Any proposal needs to be coupled with binding commitments to avoid or mitigate traffic impacts.
- Developer should provide benefits to the immediately affected neighborhoods.
- Additional amenities could include open space and assistance with bike path development.
- Consideration should be given to phasing the construction of any project to take into account the status of the Lowell Street Bridge replacement, unknown impacts on Cedar and Lowell Streets, and the possible establishment of a Green Line Extension.
- Consideration should be given to delaying the project until the completion of the Lowell Street Bridge, and completion of a post bridge construction traffic study.
- Proper pest control measures must be implemented during and after demolition, environmental, and construction work.

### **Process Going Forward**

This document should be used as a guide and should not be viewed as a substitute for any other required review or design discussions.

- The City and the Citywide Design Review Committee should continue to seek timely involvement of the surrounding neighborhoods.
- The developer should meet with the public on a regular basis as plans progress. There must be sufficient opportunity to take neighborhood views into account as proposals are developed.

### **Recommendations for the City of Somerville**

The key to a successful development of the Maxpak Site is through the City's active involvement in assuring mitigation requirements for past and present projects are upheld and with diligent enforcement of the City's laws.

- Parking and traffic enforcement should be more consistent and rigorous in the neighborhoods surrounding the site, even without further development.
- Specifically, to address sight line issues caused by illegal parking at the corner of Cedar and Clyde Streets, the City should examine the use of increased sidewalk width, installation of obstacles, and ticketing by police cruisers.
- Use of a raised crosswalk at the intersection of the Community Path and Cedar Street should be examined as part of the Community Path extension project.
- Roadway construction and utility work should be coordinated with project construction schedule.
- City should also improve the enforcement of permit conditions for all projects. Lack of enforcement serves to undermine public faith in the system as well as increase the impact of new developments on existing residents.

## **APPENDIX**

**APPENDIX A: Aerial Photo of Maxpak Area**

**APPENDIX B: Summaries of Fall 2004 Community Workshops and  
Consultant Presentations (Separate Document)**



## APPENDIX A: Aerial Photo of Maxpak Area



**APPENDIX B: Summaries of Fall 2004 Community Workshops and  
Consultant Presentations**